

A tomb is the very best thing  
For a gift to our lord the king.

—JAMES THOMSON.

# A Nation Kneeling at the Cannon's Mouth

Korolenko



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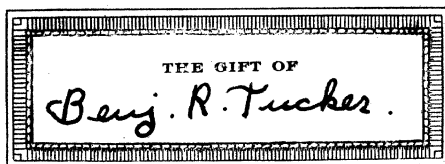
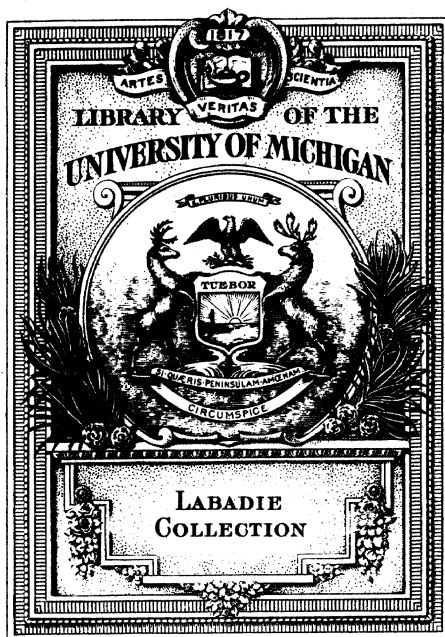
# A Nation Kneeling at the Cannon's Mouth

BY

VLADIMIR KOROLENKO



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1906



## PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

*The letter following, written by the famous Russian, Vladimir Korolenko, author of "The Blind Musician," will give Americans a better idea of the present tragic situation of the Russian people than can be gathered from the most diligent reading of the cable despatches. It appeared on January 21 (Gregorian calendar) in the Russian journal, "Poltavtchina." Ten days after its appearance State Councillor Filonoff, who was responsible for the atrocities denounced by Korolenko, was "executed" by a Russian revolutionist of Poltava. The "Poltavtchina" of February 1 gave the following account of the "execution":*

Mr. Filonoff, first councillor of the governmental administration, was killed yesterday morning at ten o'clock in Alexander street. A stranger, walking straight up to him as he was passing the Bank of Commerce, fired a revolver in his mouth, and then, replacing the weapon in his pocket, disappeared. Filonoff fell dead. The ball, entering by the mouth, had come out through the neck. The body, picked up by a policeman and a witness of the murder, was carried to the hospital. A small pool of blood had formed upon the sidewalk. The news of the murder spread rapidly through the city, and soon a large crowd had gathered on the spot. Before long came the different authorities and the fellow-officials of the deceased. The search for the murderer, so far, has been fruitless. It is needless to say that Filonoff's unexpected end has caused a great excitement throughout the city, and a local newspaper, trying to establish a connection between the assault and the

letter of Vladimir Korolenko, directly accuses Korolenko of inciting to Filonoff's murder. This very serious charge may lead to grave consequences for the great writer.

*On February 10, because of these accusations, Korolenko left Poltava for St. Petersburg. Immediately after the appearance of his letter the revolutionary press had begun a campaign against him. When the murder supervened, the local Black Hundred began to threaten him. At the thought of his danger the people of the neighboring villages, where his name has become extremely popular, grew much excited. They declared that, if a hand were laid on Vladimir Korolenko, they would rush upon the town and sack it. Korolenko's departure is partly to be explained by his desire to remove, by his absence, all pretext for collision between the various factions. He has been prosecuted for his letter, but has been released from custody, on bail. The publication of the review, "Rousskoye Bogatstvo" (Russian Wealth), of which he is editor-in-chief, has been suspended. Now for the letter,—a document which in history may rival in importance the "J'ACCUSE" of Zola.*

# A NATION KNEELING AT THE CANNON'S MOUTH

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OPEN LETTER TO MR. STATE COUNCILLOR FILONOFF

*Mr. State Councillor:*

Personally, we are not acquainted. But you are an official whose name has been made widely notorious in this section of the country by your campaigns against your fellow-countrymen. I am a writer who proposes to cast a retrospective glance over the brief record of your exploits.

But first a few preliminary observations.

In the borough of Sorotchintsi meetings had been held and speeches delivered. The inhabitants of Sorotchintsi presumed, evidently, that the manifesto of October 17 gave them the right of assembly and speech. And, in truth, it did. The manifesto granted these rights, and added that no Russian citizen was responsible save to the courts. It proclaimed further the participation of the people in the legislation of the country, calling these things "the immovable bases"

of the new Russian social order.

So the inhabitants of Sorotchintsi were not mistaken on this point. Only they were not aware that, on an equal footing with the new principles, had been maintained the former "provisional laws,"—the "state of defence," the "state of siege," etc.,—which permit the administration, at any given moment, to entangle the rights of the nation in a network of authorizations and prohibitions,—permit it, in short, to nullify all these rights and even to characterize them as disorders and riots requiring the intervention of armed force. True, the administration was invited to conform its acts to the spirit of the new fundamental law, but—the administration kept also the old circulars and interpreted the new suggestions in the light of the absolutism of the past.

For two months the higher authorities of Poltava oscillated between these opposite principles. In the city speeches and meetings took their course, and the people sought eagerly to understand the events of the time. Undoubtedly, during all this, some harsh and perhaps excessive things were said, and the different opinions and declarations were not always consistent. But we are accustomed to judge phenomena by the



importance of their results. The fact is that in the stormiest days, when from every hand came news of destruction, of murder, of repression, at Poltava there was nothing of the kind. Nor were there here any of those peremptory processes to which agrarian movements were resorting in other places. Some, and rightly, attributed this to the relative toleration practised by the higher authorities of Poltava with regard to liberty of speech and meeting. Under this influence popular passions were moderating, conscience was freeing itself, reliance on legal methods was growing firmer, and hopes were turning toward the free institutions in prospect. A little more, it seemed, and public opinion would form and clear itself as wine clears itself after active and boisterous fermentation. And besides, was it not a matter of necessity that the people should apply themselves to the definitive elaboration of the supreme legislative institution of the country?

Alas! that state of things is now but a memory. Since December 13 the authorities of Poltava have been following a different tactic. As results: savage devastation in the city by the Cossacks, blood flowing in torrents in the country districts. Faith in the range

of the manifesto is shaken, conscious efforts are dying out, rougher elements are breaking loose, or, what is worse, are gathering strength within, brooding hatred and revenge . . .

Why do I say all this to you, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff? I understand perfectly that all the great principles declared (only in words, unhappily) in the manifesto of October 17, 1905, are to you foreign and organically hostile. Nevertheless, they are already the fundamental law of the Russian State, its "im-movable bases." Do you understand the criminal aspect that your acts would wear before the tribunal of these principles? . . .

But I will be moderate, more than moderate, conciliatory even to excess. So I will apply to you, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, only the ordinary standards of the old Russian laws current prior to October 17.

Here are the facts:

In Sorotchintsi and in the neighboring village of Oustivitsa meetings were held without formal authorization. Speeches were made, and resolutions passed. Among other declarations there was one for the closing of the monopoly wine-shops. By decree of the communes the doors of these shops were sealed, with-

out awaiting official authorization.

On December 18, in the name of the "state of defence,"—that is, without a warrant,—one of the inhabitants of Sorotchintsi, Besvikonni, the most popular of the champions of their interests, was arrested. His fellow-citizens demanded his production in court and his release on bail. These requirements of judicial investigation, in place of odious administrative absolutism, are becoming general; they have been adopted in several boroughs and villages of our province, and with success. But the inhabitants of Sorotchintsi were met with a refusal. Then, in their turn, they arrested the police commissioner and another policeman.

On December 19 the chief of police of the district, Barbache, arrived at Sorotchintsi with a squadron of Cossacks. He had an interview with the imprisoned policemen, and yielding, it is said, to their persuasions, promised to intercede in favor of the liberation of Besvikonni. At the same time he went away with his squadron. But, immediately afterward, halting at the confines of the borough and dividing his detachment into two parts, he effected a circular maneuver, and approached the crowd anew. Then occurred a

fatal collision, the details of which will be established in court. As a result, the chief of police was mortally wounded, and twenty of the inhabitants were either wounded mortally or killed outright.

Do you know, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, under what circumstances these twenty persons perished? Did the entire twenty kill the chief of police? Did they attack him? Did they resist him? Did they defend the murderers?

No. The Cossacks did not content themselves with dispersing the crowd and liberating the police commissioner. They began to pursue the fugitives, and, on overtaking them, massacred them. That is not all: they rushed into the borough, hunting down any of the inhabitants that they chanced to meet.

Thus, beside Mr. Maisinka's house, was killed the keeper, Otreschko, peacefully engaged in cleaning the snow from his master's steps. Garkovenko was feeding his cattle in his yard, half a mile from the town-hall. A Cossack took aim at him from the street corner; Garkovenko fell, wounded, before he had seen the rascal. The old druggist, Fabien Pérévozky, was returning from the post-office with his son. Unexpectedly a Cossack shot the son before the father's

eyes, near the Orloff house. Serge Kovchoune was killed a few yards from his own door. The wife of a peasant named Makovestky was killed in the same doorway. A young girl by the name of Kélépof had both cheeks cut off. I could give you with exactness the place and circumstances of all the massacres of Sorotchintsi. It is enough for me to say that eight persons were killed at the town-hall or in the neighborhood; twelve fell in the street, beside their houses, or in their back-yards.

Now, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, I will permit myself to ask you this question: on December 19 was there only one crime committed in Sorotchintsi, or were there several, many crimes? Do you suppose that there is no precious blood save that which flows in the veins of people in uniform, and that the blood of men in caftans can be poured out like water, with impunity? Does it not seem to you that, if it is indispensable to inquire who killed the unfortunate Barbache and under what circumstances, it is no less so to inquire who, carrying arms, massacred in the streets, in the dooryards, in the kitchen-gardens, unarmed passers-by who were attacking nobody and not even defending themselves,—simple poor people who

had not even been present at the scene of the fatal event of which they were ignorant, and who died in this ignorance?

Oh, no! It is entirely needless to apply to this tragedy the great principles of the new "fundamental law." It is sufficient to invoke no matter what law of no matter what country having the most elementary notions of written laws or of the common law. Betake yourself, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, to the land of the half-savage Kurds, to the country of the Bashi-Bazouks. There the first judge whom you meet will answer you: "We too have among us much armed brigandage, dishonoring our country in the eyes of the entire world. Nevertheless, our imperfect laws recognize that the blood of the people, no less than that of an official, calls for justice."

Will you venture to deny this, openly and publicly, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff?

Certainly not. Then we are in agreement that it was incumbent on the representative of power and of the law, on going to Sorotchintsi for the first time after the tragedy of December 19, to play there a stern, but an honorable and solemn *rôle*. On this spot, where agitation, chagrin, and terror already pre-

vailed, it was his duty to recall the law, severe undoubtedly, but also impartial and just, which rises above the impulses and passions of the moment, and disavows the violence of the crowd, but which at the same time—mark it well, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff—*does not admit even the thought of class vengeance taken by an official upon an entire population . . .*

It was important for him to demonstrate to the people that the laws have not yet ceased to act in Russia; that the guarantees of justice, solemnly proclaimed by the manifesto of the czar, are not a dead letter, a broken promise. However, we have already agreed to let that pass, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff. . . . And besides, were this problem before us, it is not to you that its solution would be entrusted.

Yet, to the astonishment of many people, in Poltava, it was precisely upon you that was imposed the heavy, difficult, and honorable task of representing the power of the law in the borough of Sorotchintsi after December 19.

What was your understanding of your duty? And how did you perform it?

Let us come to the facts:

On December 21 the body of Barbache, who had

died in the hospital, was carried away from Sorotchintsi. The church-bells had not yet ceased to toll when you, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, made your entrance into the borough at the head of a squadron of Cossacks.

Was there, at that moment, any sign of rebellion? Did you encounter the least resistance? Had barricades been built to obstruct your passage? Were there any crowds bearing arms? Was any opposition offered to your procedure of investigation?

No. All trace of resistance or of any sort of violence had already disappeared from the borough of Sorotchintsi. The inhabitants were crushed under the weight of the terrible misfortune that had fallen upon them like a thunderbolt on December 19. They clearly understood the necessity of judicial intervention, and, if they had witnessed the advent of an examining magistrate armed only with the law, then too they would not have resisted, even in face of a squadron of Cossacks, whose *rôle*, in their eyes, should be solely to guard the free exercise of the law and not to punish people who have not been convicted, or to violate the law themselves by wrongful and vindictive acts of violence.



Yes, beyond any doubt, things would have taken their course in this way and no other. Especially as the inhabitants were looking to the judicial authorities for justice for themselves, in the name of the poured-out blood of so many of their relatives.

But it was not an examining magistrate that was sent to Sorotchintsi. It was you, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff (first councillor of the governmental administration). It is on you that falls the responsibility of the monstrous conduct of the armed troops sent under your orders, who transformed themselves from guardians of the law into violators of the law.

From the start you acted in Sorotchintsi as if you were in a conquered country. You ordered the communal assembly to meet, and declared that, in case of failure to do so, you would not "leave one stone standing on another" in the entire borough. Is it astonishing that, after such orders, given in such terms, the Cossacks began to execute them punctually? Is it astonishing that the whole village is now talking, giving names, of a whole series of extortions and rapes, committed by the troops under your command?

What need had you of this communal assembly, and what were your acts of legal investigation in its

presence?

Your first act was to order them *all on their knees*, having surrounded them with Cossacks with drawn swords; and then you advanced two cannons. Everybody submitted; everybody knelt, in the snow, with uncovered head. Two hours later you noticed the presence, in the kneeling crowd, of two knights of the cross of St. George. You allowed them to go. Then the new conscripts and the children were relieved. Those who remained you kept, under penalty of death, for four hours and a half, in this degrading posture, not even thinking that in this multitude thus illegally tortured there were people who had not yet buried their dead, the innocent victims of December 19,—brothers, fathers, daughters, before whom the murderers ought to have been on their knees imploring pardon.

You needed this multitude as the background of a picture, as proof of your official omnipotence and grandeur, and of your contempt of the laws that protect the persons and the rights of Russian citizens against mad absolutism. And, after this, of what consisted your investigation, your judicial inquiries? You summoned individuals before you, separately,

from a list prepared in advance.

For what purpose? To question them? To establish the degree of guilt and responsibility?

Not at all. Scarcely had the person summoned opened his mouth to answer the question, to offer an explanation, to prove perhaps utter non-participation in the event, when you, with your own councillor's hand, and with all your might, struck him in the face and handed him on to the Cossacks. The latter, in obedience to your orders, continued the criminal torture which you had begun, knocked him down into the snow, and beat him on the head and in the face with their nagaïkas (knouts), until the victim had lost voice and consciousness and human form.

It was precisely in this fashion that you behaved, for instance, with Simon Gritchenko, at whose house, it had been reported to you, one of the "orators" had passed the night. Show me, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, the law by which a man giving hospitality to another for a night becomes responsible for all his words and all his acts, especially when his guilt is not yet proved. And yet, hardly had Gritchenko opened his mouth to explain when you began to beat him full in the face and then delivered him to the mercy of

your Cossacks. After these first acts of violence he was imprisoned. Not satisfied with this, you had him summoned again in order to strike him in the face yourself once more and have him beaten a second time by the Cossacks.

The same fate was shared by Gérôme Moucha, in whose house was kept the key of the monopoly wine-shop closed by the commune; only, the latter received from you, in addition, a kick in the belly. The same processes, and twice over, were applied by you to Basile Pokrof, Abraam Gotlieb, Simon Sorokine, Simon Koverko. I will not stop to name the entire twenty persons favored by you with blows and kicks and then delivered to the torturers to be passed under the knouts. One more, however, I will mention,—the student Romanofsky.

The student Romanofsky is a “privileged” person; you did not dare to strike him with your own hands. You even hesitated to have him beaten by the Cossacks; he was simply imprisoned. But, when he was once behind the bars, a Cossack cried: “Why not the knout?”

It seemed to you that the Cossack was right. All are equal before the law. In its name crying iniquities

were going on here. Why not equalize them all before iniquity? The student Romanofsky was brought out again; scarcely had he reached the steps when he was hurled into the snow and beaten unmercifully. Fortunately some one took enough pity on him to advise him to wrap his head in his *bashlik*.

Yet even with this you were not content. Throwing your superb look over the crowd kneeling in the snow and draping yourself in your councillor's majesty, the inspiration of a new act of cruelty suddenly illuminated you. At your command the Jews were sorted from the Christians, and, still kneeling, all the Jews were beaten. And you meantime made the following observation: "The Jews are intelligent, and the worst enemies of Russia." And the Cossacks ran hither and thither in the crowd, cudgelling right and left men, women, and graybeards, "like sheep and lambs," to use the pictorial expression of eye-witnesses. And you, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, you watched all this, stimulating the zeal of the torturers.

Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, believe me: I am weary, horribly weary, simply from describing in writing all the illegal basenesses and ferocities to which you, without discrimination, submitted the

population of Sorotchintsi under pretext of judicial inquiry, without so much as trying to unravel their participation in the tragedy of December 19. And yet you were dealing with living creatures. It remains for me to tell how you repaired the next day to the village of Oustivitsa, there to perform new exploits. . . . And behind you, like the trophies of a victor, were dragged your prisoners of war, bruised, torn, exhausted,—suffering beings whose proper place was the hospital.

And thus you went to Oustivitsa, to reestablish the power of the law. . . .

What had happened at Oustivitsa up to the time of your advent? There there had been no rebellion, no arrest of a police commissioner, no murder of a chief of police, no collision. A single incident: the agreement to close the monopoly wine-shop, carried out without awaiting official authorization. The seals on the door testified only to the voluntary decision of the inhabitants to drink no more. . . .

True, this had been done without observing the legal formalities. But you yourself, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, you, an official and a servant of the law,—did you observe the “legal formalities” in

doing your infamous work?

Moreover, I am wrong: the very night before, in accordance with the order sent by you to Sorotchintsi, the inhabitants had removed the seals from the door of the monopoly wine-shop, and so, on your arrival, there remained not even a trace of transgression of the law. . . . The saloon was open, and wine was being sold there to drunkards freely and without supervision. Nevertheless, this did not deter you from fresh madman's pranks, which I will not describe in detail, leaving the exact account of them to justice, provided it shall come some day.

I confine myself to noting that, avenging this time solely the rights of the fiscal monopoly, you began to beat the mayor; you tore from his breast the emblem of his office and flung it into the snow. Then came the turn of the mayor's secretary. Your exhausted imagination caused you to seize the abacus and break it over the secretary, so that now he is unable to draw up more protocols or write more decrees. Here too you showered blows upon Denis Bakalo, who had come to the town-hall in search of information, striking him on the head with the register.

The inhabitants of Oustivitsa, like those of Soro-

tchintsi, were compelled to kneel in the snow, and were beaten with knouts. And likewise the court, if it shall sit, will have to pass upon the authenticity of the horrible stories told by the people of the rapes committed upon the women by the Cossacks. You certainly will understand the difficulty of making public the names of these victims.

Here, as at Sorotchintsi, the multitude was kept upon its knees for two hours, while you extorted the names of the "instigators" and a decree dismissing all persons hostile to the higher administration. This compels me to remind you, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, that torture has not been allowed in Russia since the time of Alexander I, that it is severely punished by the law, and that corporal punishment, even in court, is forbidden, without exception, by the manifesto of August 11, 1904. As for decrees obtained by processes obviously criminal, they have no legal value.

I have finished. And now, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, I wait.

I wait to see, in case there still remains in our country any shadow of justice, in case honor and professional duty are not unknown to you, your fellow-



officials, and your chiefs, in case we have any prosecuting officers, courts, and magistrates understanding the law or possessing the judicial conscience,—I wait to see which of us two, you or I, is to sit on the prisoners' bench and suffer the judicial penalty.

You, since you are publicly charged with acts contrary to duty, to dignity, and to professional honor, in that, under pretext of judicial inquiry, you introduced into Sorotchintsi and Oustivitsa, not the idea of legal justice and power, but simply ferocious and illegal vengeance of officialism and officials against insubordination to officials. Vengeance not even upon the guilty, for the guilty must first be found. No! You have launched a blind and savage tempest of torture and violence against all, without discrimination,—among them many innocents.

If you can deny it, I will willingly take your place on the prisoners' bench, and demonstrate that you have done more than I have been able to describe, here, with my feeble pen. . . .

I will demonstrate that, in calling you a torturer and a law-breaker, I say only that which your acts directly justify me in saying.

In practising undeniably abominable cruelties and

illegalities, in trampling under foot all the laws, old and new, you are undermining in the people, not only faith in the sincerity and range of the manifesto, but the very idea of law and power. Which means that you and your like are pushing the people into the path of despair, violence, and reprisals.

I know that you can invoke the excuse that you are not alone ; that acts like yours, even surpassing yours, go unpunished among us. Such is the sad truth, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff.

But it is no justification for you. If I address myself to you, it is because I live in Poltava ; because the city is filled with living pictures of your baseness ; because the groans of your victims rise here to my ears.

If, like your fellows, you go unpunished ; if, through the condescension of your superiors and the impotence of the law, you succeed in avoiding the courts, preferring to bear in bravado, with the cockade, the stigma of these heavy public accusations, —then, even then, I am convinced that the letter which I address to you will bear its fruits.

Let the country know to what order of things, to what force of law, to what responsibility of officials,

to what protection of the rights of the citizen, one can appeal two months after the manifesto of October 17!

After all that has been said, you will understand why I cannot, at the end of this letter, even as a matter of form, Mr. State Councillor Filonoff, extend to you the assurance of my consideration.

VLADIMIR KOROLENKO.

*Poltava, January 21, 1906.*

L'ANCIEN RÉGIME;  
OR,  
THE GOOD OLD RULE.

Who has a thing to bring  
For a gift to our lord the king,  
Our king all kings above?  
A young girl brought him love;  
And he dowered her with shame,  
With a sort of infamous fame,  
And then with lonely years  
Of penance and bitter tears:  
Love is scarcely the thing  
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring  
For a gift to our lord the king?  
A statesman brought him planned  
Justice for all the land;  
And he in recompense got  
Fierce struggle with brigade and plot,  
Then a fall from lofty place  
Into exile and disgrace;  
Justice is never the thing  
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring  
For a gift to our lord the king?  
A writer brought him truth;  
And first he imprisoned the youth;  
And then he bestowed a free pyre,  
That the works might have plenty of fire,  
And also to cure the pain  
Of the headache called thought in the brain:  
Truth is a very bad thing  
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring  
For a gift to our lord the king?  
The people brought their sure  
Loyalty fervid and pure;  
And he gave them bountiful spoil  
Of taxes and hunger and toil,  
Ignorance, brutish plight,  
And wholesale slaughter in fight:  
Loyalty's quite the worst thing  
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring  
For a gift to our lord the king?  
A courtier brought to his feet  
Servility graceful and sweet,  
With an ever ready smile  
And an ever supple guile;  
And he got in reward the place  
Of the statesman in disgrace:  
Servility's always a thing  
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring  
For a gift to our lord the king?  
A soldier brought him war,  
*La gloire, la victoire,*  
Ravage and carnage and groans,  
For the pious *Te Deum* tones;  
And he got in return for himself  
Rank and honors and pelf:  
War is a very fine thing  
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring  
For a gift to our lord the king?  
A harlot brought him her flesh,  
Her lust, and the manifold mesh  
Of her wiles interwolved with caprice;  
And he gave her his realm to fleece,  
To corrupt, to ruin, and gave  
Himself for her toy and her slave:  
Harlotry's just the thing  
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring  
For a gift to our lord the king?  
Our king who fears to die?  
A priest brought him a lie,  
The blackness of hell uprolled  
In heaven's shining gold;  
And he got as guerdon for that  
A see and a cardinal's hat:  
A lie is an excellent thing  
To bring as a gift for our king.

Has any one yet a thing  
For a gift to our lord the king?  
The country gave him a tomb,  
A magnificent sleeping-room :  
And for this it obtained some rest,  
Clear riddance of many a pest,  
And a hope which it much enjoyed  
That the throne would continue void :  
A tomb is the very best thing  
For a gift to our lord the king.

*James Thomson.*



# The Anarchists

## A Picture of Civilization at the Close of the Nineteenth Century

BY

JOHN HENRY MACKAY

*Translated from the German by*

GEORGE SCHUMM

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